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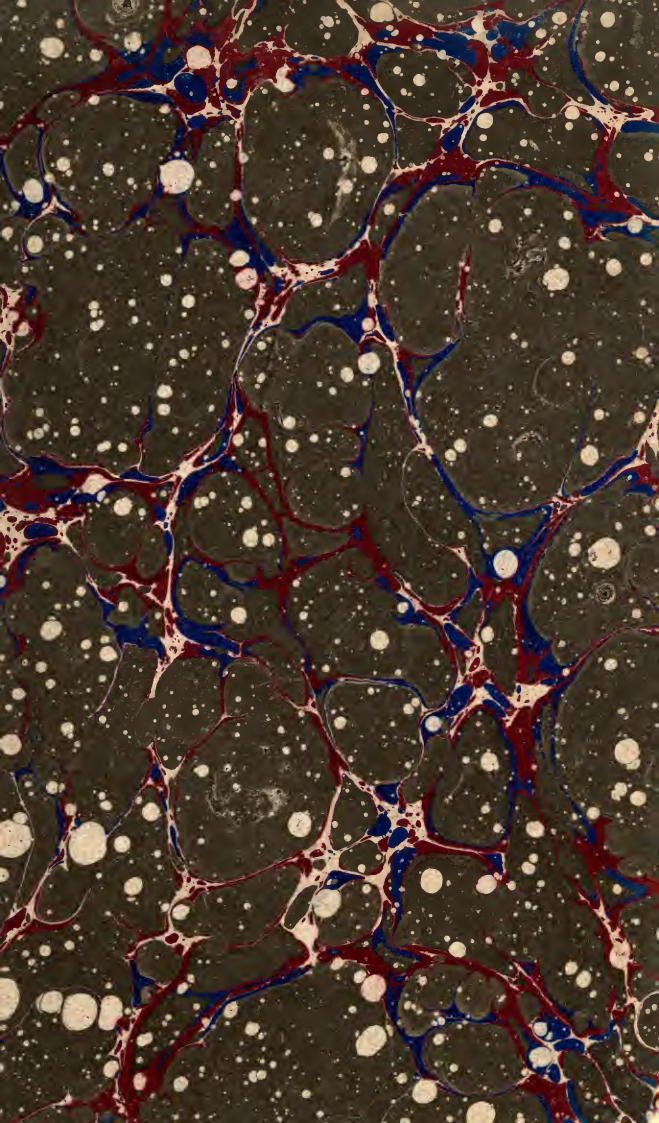
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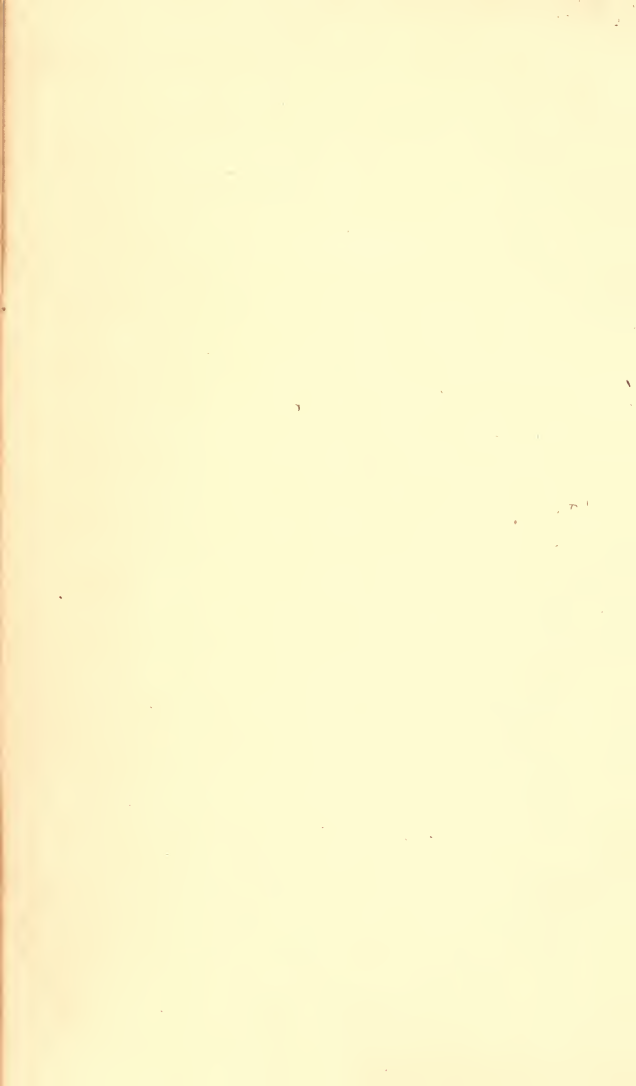
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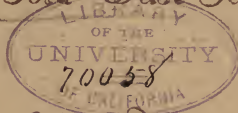




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"The Gold Dust Series."



*The Man
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The Man from Nowhere

BY

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THE MAN FROM NOWHERE.

AT the gate I turned an instant and looked back, and there still stood my wife in her faded print dress, Rob beside her, barefooted and ragged, and Ellie in her shabby little shoes. Even as I stood there looking, I felt a sharp, quick throb of pain, like a presage of the future, and something warned me that memory had received the picture, to fling it back, barbed with anguish, in years to come.

I was only going away for a little trip, a matter of a few hours' ride by rail, to the State fair in a neighboring town, where business called me. Not that I was any great stock-raiser, thriving horticulturist, or rushing business man. Only a plain farmer. Shiftless, the neighbors called me, and wondered why Jane Markham had thrown over Tom Jones to marry me. Tom

was a pushing, enterprising young man, with a nice business in town, plenty of money, good looks, and a bright, taking way with him. I, James Brown, was almost middle-aged when I first saw her; old for my age, as well, with a sober way of looking at things, that came, perhaps, from the hardships I had always known. Shy of women, too, and with nothing to offer my wife but a shabby little house a mile out of town, a few acres of good grain land about it, and a pair of hands that had never been soiled by a dishonest deed, and were willing to work to the bone for the woman I loved.

And I did work, but not in a way that told. We got along well at first, selling our small crops at fair prices, raising chickens and sending eggs to the market, with now and then a firkin of butter to spare; living close, with no luxuries and few comforts to speak of, but setting out young fruit-trees and

training vines about the house, until it began to take on a sightly look, and we had as happy a little home as anybody for miles around.

Until our second baby came—the first had been a boy, but this was a girl—up to this time I had been tolerably content to keep on as I was going, and build up slowly and surely for the future. But looking at that frail, delicate little creature, and thinking how helpless girls are on this earth anyhow, and how bad it would be if anything happened to me, made me wish I could have some quick, splendid stroke of luck that would set us all ahead in the world, beyond chance of want. And then it was that a notion came into my head. Since I was a boy I had always had a hankering after machinery, and a knack for putting things together. I was out in the field, I remember, the sun blazing down upon me, mowing grain with an

old-fashioned reaper, and thinking of all the labor before me in binding it up into bundles, when the idea struck me. 'Thinks I, if only some machine could be planned out now, that would cut the grain and bind it at the same time, what a lot of work it would save. Yes, and be a fortune, too, to any man. Perhaps one might construct something that would do the whole thing. But how to go about it? I drew a stump of a pencil from my pocket, took out a little account-book that I always carried, and there, in the broiling hot sun, began to draw a plan of the machine.

Well, to make a long story short, I worked four years upon it, day and night. Often and often I've got up in the middle of the night and gone out into my little shop, and studied upon the thing, or put bits of brass and tin together to see how they'd work. Four years I kept at it, and the weeds grew

all over the place, the fence broke down and cattle got in, and everything was well on the road to ruin. To finish up my model and get the patent put through, I mortgaged the farm, and then, when it was all done and the patent secured, I found there was another man already in the field with a machine that did the same work, and it was an open question whether his or mine was the best. That was what I was going down to the State fair for. Both our machines were to be taken out into the field for a test trial, and upon whether I won or failed depended all the results of four years' labor.

I lived among a very practical set of people, and you may readily believe that I hadn't a friend or neighbor but what had pronounced me a "poor stick" long before this. Everybody but my wife; she always had a patient smile and a cheering word, though I

don't believe she ever had a grain of faith in my success. She came out on the porch when I started off, Rob by her side, and Ellie, the little girl, in her arms. She was a wee creature, was Ellie, small for her age, but like a dove in her ways. She stretched out her arms to hug and kiss me. As I took her I noticed that her poor little shoes were fairly falling to pieces.

"Papa get Ellie some new shoes," said the child, smiling up into my face. Poor little dear. The shame of it! My wife hadn't a decent dress to her back, and Rob had gone barefooted since early spring. I looked at Jane, and it seemed to me for a moment that a quick spark of indignation shone in her eye.

"Yes, yes, papa will get Ellie some shoes," I said hastily, then put her down and started off. And then it was that I turned and looked back, and the thought of all I'd left undone

came over me, and it seemed as if I couldn't take my eyes from them, and when I tried to walk off down the road, my feet moved as if they were weighted with lead.

I remember it all as well as if it had been yesterday. It is twenty years gone by, but the events of that week stand out in my mind like a bit of writing on a great blank page.

Of course you know what State fairs are throughout the Middle West? Always held in midsummer, when the weather is hot and sultry. A great, barn-like building, with narrow galleries running around above, and cobwebs hanging from the rafters. Thousands of people bustling in and out, asking questions, disputing over the state of the crops, and quarreling over premiums. Little boys and big boys hawking peanuts and lemonade; children crying from the heat; men sopping their faces with their handker-

chiefs; the air reeking with the smell of machinery, hot cakes, preserves, and over-ripe fruit; everybody hot and miserable, and the exhibitors all wondering why the committee couldn't have fixed the time a month or so earlier or later.

Well, as I was saying, there I was along with the rest, in charge of my machine, sometimes showing it off to people, sometimes listening to my rival, who had the section adjoining mine, as he cried up the merits of his invention. The contest was not to come off until the last day of the fair, so, to while away the time and keep as far as possible from the man who threatened to ruin my chances of success, I neighbored a good deal with the occupant of the next stall beyond me on the other side. Oddly enough, of all men in the world, this was Tom Jones. And oddly enough, of all things in the world, he was there with an invention

of his own, a machine for hatching chickens by artificial heat. A most ridiculous and impractical venture, every one agreed; but Tom talked in quite a lofty way, of how it was no new thing, but a practice among the old Egyptians, who used men instead of coal-oil heaters, and somehow or other Tom had contrived to get out a few chickens, sickly little creatures that went chipping round and looking the miserable little orphans they were. However, Tom was rational on every other subject, and we overlooked old scores and grew quite friendly and sociable.

The weather was hot, and the air was close and sultry until we reached the last day but one. Then it grew so choking and oppressive that people began to predict a change in the weather. And sure enough, just after noon, dark clouds began to loom up in the southwest, and the storm came

down upon us; came with a loud roar and flashes of lightning, and the rain falling in sheets. I remember looking out of the window and thinking that the grain would be so wet the trial of our machines would very likely be put off. But the air was fresh and cool, and it seemed to me a day or so would make little difference.

Just then Tom Jones came along, complaining of the heat. Tom's section was near the big engine that kept the machinery running, and the cool air from outside hadn't reached him yet.

"I'm cool as a cucumber," said I. "Hullo! You've got on a thick coat and I've got on a thin one. Let's change about."

I never saw a man more relieved than Tom, when he had handed over his cassimere to me and got into my linen duster.

"Ten thousand thanks to you, Brown," he said. "If your mowing

machine turns out a failure, I'll give you an interest in my chicken-hatcher."

"Much good your old wooden hen will do anybody," I shouted back, good-humoredly. Tom laughed back a reply, waving his hand in mock pride toward his little poultry-yard, when something awful happened. There was a terrible and deafening roar, the air was thick with smoke and steam and flying objects, drops of some horrible fluid spattered everywhere, and I felt a stunning blow on the top of my head.

The next that I remember I found myself sitting on a pile of lumber outside. Somebody yelled:

"The engine has blown up!"

Some people were running out of the building and a great many were running toward it. There was a great deal of screaming and crying, but I couldn't understand what it was all about, and didn't care to. The pain in

my head was intolerable. I put my hand up and found that my hair was sticky and wet with blood. I stole around to the rear of the building and washed myself there, but there were stains on my clothing that wouldn't come off. Some people who were standing about looked at me curiously, but I kept my head turned away, for it vexed me to be noticed. After a while I went back to the pile of boards. It was dark then, and I felt stupid and tired, but had no inclination to go back to my boarding-place. In fact, I was so confused and mixed up that I wasn't sure I could find it if I tried. Gradually the noises became distant and indistinct, the lights receded, and the big building faded away.

The next that I remember I was sitting up, wide awake. Not awake in the ordinary sense of healthy, cheerful activity of brain and body, but with that dreadful pressure on my head

still weighting me down, while all my faculties were unnaturally sharpened and strained.

I knew now, as well as if I had been told, exactly what had happened. Tom Jones had tried to blow up my machine and kill me. It was a vile conspiracy to get possession of my wife and property. Yes, and Jane was in it, and Rob. I hadn't a friend on earth but poor little Ellie, who was too small and innocent to take part in their villainous schemes. Or, perhaps, he was going to steal my patent.

I would foil him there. My papers were all safe in my breast-pocket. I reached into my pocket and drew them out, and spread them before me in the pale light of dawn. Good heavens! They were all descriptions of the egg-hatcher, with cuts of the machine. Then I remembered the change of coats; all a part of the same cruel plot. My whole mind became concentrated

upon the thought of revenge. How to get even with them—how to expose their blood-thirsty, diabolical attempt to the world? I held my head tightly between my hands, for it seemed as if it would burst. Something came peeping and yipping over my foot. It was one of those poor little half-feathered monstrosities that Tom had hatched out of his infernal machine.

At the sight of this a brilliant thought entered my mind. I would steal Tom's patent. Not there, where people knew all about it, and he had friends who would work against me, but I would go away off somewhere and get some rich man to take it up. There was a wealthy railway president in New York whose name I had seen in the papers, and who had a reputation for enterprise and bold speculation. I would go to him, lay down the case, and get him interested in it. Once get capital enlisted on my side,

and Tom would have no sort of a show.

I took the chicken and stuffed it into my pocket for a sample. Somebody came along, and I knew it was a spy Tom had sent out to hunt around for me and see if I was still alive. So I crouched beside the pile of boards to wait for the man to pass. The chicken in my pocket peeped—I squeezed it to stop its noise; it fluttered a little, but pretty soon it was still. Then I rose cautiously and made my way down to the big Union Depot, keeping on the outskirts of the town and dodging everybody I saw. Luckily my wallet was in my trousers pocket, and I had enough money to pay my fare, with a little to spare.

I found it hard to count the money when I paid for my ticket, and was sure the agent cheated me out of a dollar. I told him so, with dignity, but would not make a fuss over it for

fear of attracting attention. I got into the car and found a seat behind the door where I could be free from observation. The more I thought it over the more I disliked the idea of asking a big capitalist to go into chicken-raising. There seemed something mean and trifling in the very suggestion. But why bother with such insignificant things? Since the principle would apply to hens' eggs, why not to turkeys'? And if to turkeys', why not to ostriches'? Ah, I had it! Alligators! That would be an enterprise worth taking up. We would supply alligators for the New York market. We would see that every town in the United States had an alligator pond. We would fill orders from menageries, dime museums, zoological gardens. We would have great tanneries for curing alligator skins, and supersede calf-skin and goat-skin and kid. I was so elated at the idea that I clapped my

hands and tossed my hat in the air and yelled.

"Here, you!" said the conductor, angrily, coming up from the other end of the car, "what are you thinking about?"

"Alligators," said I, smiling shrewdly at him, as I leaned forward with a hand resting on either knee.

"Well, behave yourself, anyhow."

He looked at me very queerly, and it struck me that he had a similar enterprise in view himself, but I thought to myself that I'd get ahead of him. When I reached New York I went first to a shoe store and bought Ellie's shoes. Then, I tell you, I lost no time in hunting up the president of the B. and O. Railroad. A darkey who sat outside his door tried to keep me out, by telling me he was engaged.

"Engagements go to thunder!" said I; "I've come five hundred miles to

see him on a matter of the greatest importance."

The darkey saw I meant business, and he wilted. I pushed my way past him, and burst into a big office beyond. There were four or five men in the room. One of them sat at a big desk covered with papers, and I knew he was the man I was after. I put my hand to my head, to ease it and collect my thoughts, for I knew everything depended upon putting the matter in an attractive and favorable light. All the while that intolerable pressure, that awful sense of heaviness, as if somebody had bound an iron weight on my head.

"I beg pardon for intruding, sir, but the business I wish to see you on admits of no delay," I began.

He interrupted me, a little fretfully, it seemed to me:

"I wish you would put it off until another time; I am engaged just now. Call to-morrow."

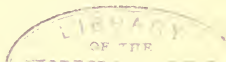
I knew if I waited till to-morrow I should lose him. Besides, I felt queerly. Something might happen to prevent my coming, and so the chance would go by. Tom Jones would get Jane and the farm, and where would I be? The fear drove me to desperation.

“What! and lose the chance of being called the ‘Alligator King’?” I shouted. “Think of walling in New York harbor and devoting it to alligator culture! Alligator meat and alligator soup! And tanneries for the skins. Think of the wealth, the fame in store for us! Hundreds of baby alligators bursting the shell at once.”

He was listening very attentively now, and so were the other men.

“All friends?” said I, winking at him and waving my hand in their direction.

“All friends,” he repeated; but I noticed he looked queer, and the other



men looked queer. He began to play with a little knob on the wall beside him.

"But how are you going to manage this thing?" he asked, politely, and I saw I had him on the hook at last.

"Ah, my dear sir, that is the secret, you see. I have the—the plan of a little device for hatching chickens, which, I am sure you will agree with me, are not worth handling by men of really large minds. Nevertheless they hatch out. Here is a specimen."

I drew the chicken from my pocket and proudly displayed it. Its eyes were shut, and I couldn't get it to open them; and its legs were stiff; but there it was, all the same.

"Asleep," I said, in explanation.

"Ugh! ugh!" they exclaimed, putting their handkerchiefs to their noses.

I saw that they were not interested in chickens, and so returned it to my pocket.

"Alligators," I began with dignity, recalling something in an old school-reader, "are viviparous animals, laying fifty to sixty eggs in a litter. All we have to do is to capture a pair and let them begin laying. You are a financier, my dear sir."

I picked up a steel eraser from the desk and jabbed it in the air, to emphasize my statement. The three men, who were standing, stepped back a little, and the railroad president jumped out of his chair and backed up against the wall. Again I saw the queer look in their eyes, and this time I understood it. Every one of them was stark, staring mad.

This horrible discovery so dumfounded me that I did not know what to do. Then I made a dash for a window, but somebody caught me from behind. I fought desperately, but it was no use; they were too strong for me. In less time than it takes to tell

it I was overpowered, dragged down stairs, put in a carriage, and was soon rattling away over the cobblestones.

When I came to look at my captors, I saw that their faces had changed. They wore blue coats and brass buttons, and looked like soldiers. I begged them to let me go, and tried to explain the matter to them. One of them snickered, and the other wouldn't look at me. It was plain that he was deaf and dumb. They took me to a big building, and into a large room, where three men were sitting on a raised platform. They asked me some very courteous questions, and I answered them as politely as I knew how. Some things they asked me—simple inquiries, too—bothered me most unaccountably. What was my name, where did I live, how old was I? If they would only get into business matters, I knew my head was clear there.

A new man came into the room,

small but powerfully built, and looking like a professional man. There was a good deal of hand-shaking. One of the three said to him in a low voice:

“Glad you came in just now. Got a curious case. You question him.”

In a few minutes the stranger turned to me and began to talk. He had such a kind, genial face, that I warmed to him at once. Here was a man to trust, one who would appreciate the glory of becoming an alligator king—one who would push the enterprise ahead with a will worthy of such a glorious cause. I got him off into a corner, and commenced to develop my scheme. He assented at first, but presently I noticed that he had lost interest in what I was saying, and was exchanging signs with the others.

Ah! I had him at last. The demon! The arch-fiend who was persecuting me and driving me to ruin. Anger

rose about and within me, like a dark cloud. I sprang at his throat. They were all upon me, trying to hold me back, but I fought like a tiger. I just managed to lay his cheek open with my nails, when my brain seemed to seethe and bubble. I was falling—falling—falling.

Of what occurred next I have only the faintest recollection. I was shut up in a room with only one window, and that high up in the wall. I cared neither to eat, drink, nor sleep. There were horrible noises around me, and some of them I made myself. Still that awful sense of pressure and of weight upon my brain. I could not think connectedly, and I gave up trying.

One morning I awoke, a new man. A bar of sunshine fell through my window, and I could have knelt and worshipped it, so beautiful did it appear. It seemed to lift me up and restore me.

The ugly sense of pressure was all gone. I looked about me and tried to remember how I came there. The room was disgustingly dirty. There was little furniture in it, and what was there was of a sort I had never seen before. Hastening to the door, I turned the knob. To my surprise it was locked. I beat upon it and called out for some one to open it. There was a narrow grating in the center, and at this grating a man's face appeared.

"Why don't you open the door," I asked quietly.

He looked at me oddly for a moment and then disappeared. A few minutes later he returned with another man. I recognized him in a moment. He was the man I had assaulted. An older man than I thought, his shoulders a little bowed and his hair quite gray. I declare I felt ashamed of myself when he opened the door and came in.

"Well, Mr.? —" he looked at me quite curiously.

"Brown, sir, James Brown," I said promptly.

"What can I do for you to-day, Brown," he said kindly, still keeping his eye upon me with that keen, searching look.

"I must go home, sir," I said earnestly. "The folks won't know what to think of it. The fact is, I've had a horrible headache. I'm afraid I've done and said some queer things," and I looked at his cheek. To my surprise, it had all healed over, leaving only a faint white scar.

"Never mind, never mind," he said hastily. "But now I want you to answer a few questions."

"All right, sir," I said respectfully, though I was in a great hurry to be off.

Then he asked me who I was, and where I came from, and I told him;

and when I asked him civilly if he'd be kind enough to tell me who he was, he only said he was Dr. R——, and had looked after me because I seemed to be sick.

“Well, doctor,” I said rising up, “I’m afraid I’ve made but a poor return for your hospitality. I acted rough when I first saw you. But if you only knew the state my head has been in!—I’ve suffered the tortures of the damned. It’s blunted all my faculties—the pain. If you’ll believe me, I couldn’t tell, to save my life, whether I’ve been here two days or a week.”

A strange expression came over the doctor’s face as he listened to my apologies.

“Brown,” said he, “suppose you come to my private office after you have washed and dressed. I want to have a talk with you.”

Looking down at my clothes, I confess I felt ashamed. They really

looked as if they had been slept in for a month. Then the condition of my hands and finger nails! I had a beard, too, of a week or so growth, stubby and rough, looking as if it had been jagged off with scissors.

The doctor hurried me through a long hall. I did not have time to look round, but I noticed that there were many doors like my own, opening off from it on either side. For this and other reasons I concluded that I was in a large private hospital. He turned me over to another man who led me to a bath-room. What a refreshment it was to feel the touch of the cool water upon my skin. I was loth to leave it, but when I finally came out of it and dressed myself in the fresh clothing provided for me, I felt like a new man.

"Would you like to take a shave, sir?" asked the attendant in whose hands I had been placed. He put the question a little doubtfully, but there

was no hesitation in my mind as I ran my hands over my chin.

"Indeed I would," I replied heartily. "Show me the way to a barber, there's a good fellow."

For answer, he took me out of a door and across a little open court to what seemed another branch of the establishment. There were a knight of the razor and his assistant, both stout, burly looking men, and shelves filled with bottles and shaving mugs, looking as if they did a rushing business.

There was no one else there when we entered. I threw myself down in the chair.

"Now give me a nice, quick shave," I said, "for I'm in a hurry and no time to spare."

The man who came in with me posted himself near by, as if he took a friendly interest in the operation. The barber tied a towel round my neck,

lathered my face, and went about the operation. He probably did the best he could, but he was a very bungling fellow. I stood it until he had cut me a couple of times; then, as he tried to staunch the blood with a napkin, I snatched up the razor and ran my finger over it.

"How on earth can you shave with such an edge?" I exclaimed, taking up the strop and beginning to run the blade along it. You would have thought I meant to cut their throats, such an expression as all three wore; and they began to move off from me.

"I'll finish this job myself," I said, coolly, and walked up to a mirror. It was absurd to see how they gesticulated when I turned my back to them, but by the time I had got through and laid the razor down, they appeared to feel relieved. Looking in the glass, I was surprised to see how little trace there was left of all

that I had suffered. My face was a little sharp and thin, that was all.

"How much shall I pay you?" smiling at them rather contemptuously, until I happened to remember that I had on a suit of clothes I had never worn before, and that as I had already been lodged and boarded and had medical attendance, my financial condition must be rather shaky.

"Oh, nothing, nothing," they assured me; "the doctor makes all that right."

Aye, the doctor. I had yet to see him, and find out how much my bill was, and have some understanding about paying it. I had already firmly made up my mind to go back to the farm and work it, and leave all nonsensical inventions to men who had money to spare for experiment—men like Tom Jones, for instance.

The doctor was in a sort of study. Books all around him, on every side. He looked serious.

“Sit down, sit down, Brown.”

I obeyed him, wondering.

“Now, my man, think a little. Can you tell me where you were, and what you were doing, before you came to New York?”

“At the State fair, in Smartsville,” I answered, promptly; “showing off my machine and waiting for it to be tested. It was awful hot weather all over the country the first of this month, you know. I got clean fagged out. Then there came a thunderstorm, and the air was so cool that I changed coats with a friend who was near the engine, and then something blew up. My head was gashed—I believe in my heart that had something to do with my headache.”

“Poor fellow! Poor fellow!” said the doctor. “Brown, are you strong enough—is your brain clear enough, are your nerves steady—able to bear a severe shock?”

"Yes, sir," I said, calmly, but my heart commenced thumping like a trip-hammer. I knew something had happened to Jane or the children.

"Tell me quick, sir," I said. "I don't feel overstrong, and if it's anything hard to bear, I'd rather begin to get used to it right away."

"Where do you suppose you are, and how long do you think you've been here?" said the doctor, beating about the bush, like.

"I suppose it's some kind of hospital," I said, slowly. "And as to the time—maybe it's a week—I hope it's not more. The folks at home would be worried at not hearing from me."

"My poor fellow," said the doctor, and this time I shrank from the pity in his voice, "my poor fellow, this is the State Insane Asylum, and you have been here sixteen years."

"Oh, my God!" I cried, and could get no further. The awful horror of

it. The pity of it. What was the use trying to comfort me, what was the use telling me to keep up my spirits? Sixteen years gone out of a man's life, and he not know it!

"But my wife and children, doctor! What have they done all this time? You're keeping something from me. Are they living or dead? To think I've been only a burden and a shame to them, when they needed me so!"

"Brown," said the doctor, soberly, and measuring with his eye the effect of his words on me, "Brown, in the case of the rest of our patients we know more or less about their previous lives, and the causes and conditions that have brought them here. You came here as a man whose identity was absolutely lost. The only papers found upon you were some circulars containing cuts and a description of an incubator, with the name of the inventor torn off. Here is the way in

which we registered you on our books."

He took down a big volume, and turned the leaves, then pushed it toward me, with his finger half-way down the page. I looked where he pointed, and read these words: "*The Man from Nowhere.*"

I could not comprehend all at once. Jane and the children: Jane and the children! These words were sounding all the while like a funeral dirge. The doctor went on:

"There is some mystery about this thing that I can't understand, and you must help me to get at it. Why is it you were not missed when that explosion occurred, and why were not your friends inquiring after you? Let me see—what year was it when that explosion occurred? Ah, 18—; and the month? August. Correct. Let us look up the matter."

He went to a cupboard beneath the book-cases, and overhauled the files of

an illustrated weekly paper, until he came to the account of the affair. There isn't space to tell you here about the long illustrated description they had. Enough to state that twenty men were killed, and my name was on the list. "Blown to pieces," the paper said, "and only identified by scraps of clothing and certain papers, and an old coin in the coat-pocket." Tom Jones was said to be missing.

"That was the friend who had on my coat," said I.

"By Jupiter!" said the doctor, "that's the way the thing came about. They mistook him for you."

"Wait a bit," I said—I wasn't used to thinking, you see, and it took time for me to follow him. Do you know what it is for a man to decipher your own history for you, word for word and page after page, and scarce be able to follow him?

"Then he was killed," said I,

soberly, and the thought oppressed me. Such a dreadful death, and our last words together in joke. I could see how Tom looked that last day, when I chaffed him about his chickens.

“Now, Brown,” said the doctor, “I suppose you’ll want to be off at once. Or would you rather write on first, to make sure, and prepare your friends a little?”

“My Lord, doctor,” I burst out, “I can’t go back now. What would be the use? Even if Jane is living, which is perhaps likely, she being far younger than I—I wasn’t always a kind husband, doctor; I was moody and out of sorts, soured and disappointed by failure. And now to come back out of a blank—a dead blank—of sixteen years. Your name fits me now, doctor. I’m the “Man from Nowhere,” indeed. Where have *I* been all these years? You’ve had my living body, shut up in a cage like a wild beast, but where was I, the

man, James Brown, all the time?"

"You've hit upon a puzzle to the metaphysicians, Brown," candidly replied the doctor. "The man isn't living who can answer your question."

Much I cared about his metaphysicians or their speculations.

"You don't understand, doctor, about my wife. She's even better off without me. Perhaps she's married again. I don't doubt she is. I'll leave her alone. If my machine had been a success—if I didn't have to go back an old man, and empty-handed!"

"What was your machine, Brown?" The doctor had been running over the file he held, and had stopped at some item that seemed to interest him.

"It was something for harvesting and binding grain," I answered carelessly, for there was nothing in the world I cared less for just then than my invention. "It ran like fun, but everybody was laughing at it. Of



course it was a fizzle. I, myself, can see now that it was full of defects. But, my Lord, what's the use of talking about it now ! ”

“ Simply because I've run across something that concerns you. Look here,” he said.

There, among a lot of personal notices, was something that read about like this :

“ The sudden and shocking death of Mr. James Brown, at the time of the recent explosion at the State fair in Smartsville, has the elements of a double tragedy. He had spent years of unwearying labor on the invention of harvesting and binding grain, which was generally looked upon as utterly chimerical, and on which he had expended his entire capital. On the day of his funeral the machine, which was uninjured by the explosion, was tested by competent judges, and pronounced a complete success. A leading manufacturing firm has made overtures to his widow, and it is understood that they have offered a large sum for the use of the patent.”

“ Why, Mr. Brown,” said the doctor, cheerfully (I noticed that he used the

Mr. from that moment), "all you have to do is to return home like the prodigal son, to be welcomed and feted, and rejoiced over."

Stupid and slow-witted as I am at best, I knew better than the doctor. Who would hold a jubilee over the resurrection of a man who had never been a favorite, never of any account in the world, and who had only found luck in going out of it? Even when the doctor wrote on and found that Jane and the children were still living, and that the widow had never married again, I felt no courage to go back. The widow! Do you know what it is to come to yourself after years of worse than oblivion, and to find yourself a dead man, piously laid to rest and buried in the memory of your friends and family? To be a ghost, a desolate, wretched ghost, of no kin to the next world or to this, caring nothing for new friends, and afraid to go back to

the old! Who would not be better off with six feet of clay above him?

I should never have had the courage to try it, if it hadn't been for the doctor. He cheered me up and urged me, and finally got me down to the depot and aboard the cars, with my ticket in my hand. He gave me something else—a small paper parcel, looking away as he laid it on the seat beside me.

“We found it in your pocket when you came to us,” he said.

I knew what it was as quickly as I laid eyes on it. The shoes for little Ellie. It did me good to hold them, for it seemed a link between the pretty darling and me, but it weakened me unaccountably all the same.

I had a little plan of my own, that I didn't confide to the doctor. I meant to happen in upon them as a stranger, and sound them like, myself, for I was confident my wife would never know

me. Then I should be sure. If I found that she was content and happy without me, that life ran on smoothly and my coming would be a break in any way, there would never be any resurrection, but Jim Brown would remain as dead as if he were really laid away in the little graveyard.

I stopped there on my way out from town. Somehow it seemed to me I wanted to go there first. It was easy to find the place. There, beside my dear old mother's grave, was another mound, and on it lay a fading wreath of flowers.

The sight of them heartened me up. A strange thing, you will think, for a man to be cheered by the sight of flowers lying on his own grave, and he himself alive and well beside it. But it told me something more. It told me that in somebody's heart love and memory were still living, that somebody held me in tender remembrance.

A plain white shaft marked the grave. One thing about it puzzled me. It read :

TO THE MEMORY OF

JAMES BROWN,

OUR BELOVED HUSBAND AND FATHER,

AUG. —, 18—.

That was all. Just the date of the explosion. No “died,” no commending my soul to the Creator, nor any other of the pious formalities usually seen on gravestones. What did it mean? I couldn’t make it out. Yet somehow it seemed as if it bore a message for me.

It brought many things back to my mind; of how patient Jane had been when she saw me loafing around and the farm going to rack and ruin; the impatient answers I had often given her; the way she had toiled and slaved, and I had forgotten to so much as show her that I realized it; and whether it wouldn’t have been much

better to have done the plain duty that lay before me, and not busied myself with ambitious plans. Thinking over these things, I looked up and saw a young lady coming along the path. She was tall and fair, with a rosy flush on her cheeks from walking. In one hand she had a little bunch of flowers, and in the other she carried a roll of music.

I can't tell you, to save my life, how the thought came to me that this was my little Ellie, grown up to be a beautiful young woman, with new friends, new interests, lovers, maybe, and yet caring enough for her plain old father who ill-provided for her and neglected her, to come all that way, over the long, dusty road, to lay flowers on his grave. But when she saw me she looked at me resentful like, and drew herself up, and waited, expecting me to go away.

Now, it may seem a very amusing

thing to you who read it, that a man shouldn't be welcome to visit his own grave. But to me it was the most pitiful thing in the world. You see, by that time I had quite made up my mind to go off and never show myself to my folks. The other day somebody who knows my story put into my hand a poem about a man named Enoch Arden, and it fixes me more strongly than ever in the belief that when a man has been so long away, and his own people have got used to living without him, and their ways have grown apart, it's a very risky thing to come back and try to pick up the dropped threads of life. I thought then I'd just quietly slip away, and write to the doctor to say nothing about it, and let things go on as they were. So, if you'll believe me, it seemed to me at that moment the most pitiful thing in the world that I shouldn't be wanted even there, at

that low mound, with the sun shining on the grass that covered it, and the tall white stone rising above it. And to see her, my own little girl grown up, standing there, hesitating and trembling, half afraid of me and half resentful at me for being there.

“Whose grave is it?”

I had risen up and was starting off, but I thought if I might only listen to her voice a moment it would be music that I could carry with me all the rest of my darkened life.

“My father’s.”

She spoke softly now, because she saw I had no mind to trouble her; but oh, the gentleness and tenderness with which she spoke those two words! To think that she should remember me so kindly all those years.

“And your mother——” Then I was dumb; I could’nt say another word; I was so unused to talking, and all the past and all the hopeless future

seemed to rise up around me, and shut me in, and stifle me. And she. What business had a stranger talking to her in that way? no doubt she was thinking. There we stood, father and daughter, I knowing her for my own little girl, who had clung about my neck and kissed me but yesterday; she believing that I lay there under the sod, and a stranger stood in my place. Was ever a situation like to that? Is there any flesh and blood could stand it? Scarcely knowing what I did, I pulled a package out from my pocket and opened it, she gazing curiously on as I did so, with that half-frightened look on her face. There were the little shoes—shining black morocco faced with pink kid. I thought of the little child who should have worn them, and my eyes filled with tears.

“Oh, Ellie! Little daughter! They were for you. Don’t you remember?”

Slowly the frightened look on her face gave way to wonder, and wonder made way for certainty, and my little child was back again, sobbing over me and caressing me in the dear old way.

After awhile I told her a little, just a little, of what I had been through, and she, heaven bless her, told me of how they could never quite believe me dead, but had hoped for years that some day they would hear from me.

“Come home, come home to mother,” she cried at last.

But all my doubts and fears and questionings seemed to rise up again and bar the way before me. Ellie understood.

“You shall see!” she said, with the same proud ring in her voice that Jane used to have.

And so we went down the road together, and took the old path I knew so well. It led alongside a level, graded

road now, shaded with tall trees. But when we came to the farm I held back and looked at Ellie, to make sure it was the same, and that memory was playing me no tricks. For there was a tall, gray house in place of our shabby little cottage, and the front yard was laid out in winding paths and drives, with flowers and shrubbery, and a lawn where a fountain was playing. Yet I could have sworn the same roses and honeysuckle we used to have still climbed over the front porch.

"The very same place, father," said Ellie, seeing how taken back I looked. "You know mother sold the patent. It is all your work."

A tall young man came down to meet us. My mind had gone back to the past, and I never thought of its being Rob, my boy. We had planned, Ellie and I, that she should go on and speak to Jane first, that she might not

get too great a shock, and so I turned down a side path, while Ellie went on to the house. I walked on until I came to the side of the house, where there was a sugar maple I had planted. The tree had grown tall and stout, with broad branching arms that cast a grateful shade. There was a seat beneath it, and a delicate-looking, elderly woman was sitting there sewing. I had not forgotten my manners, and so I raised my hat and begged her pardon, and started to go away. But she rose to her feet, dropping her work upon the ground, and cried out in a voice I never could mistake.

Is it the constant beating of the human mind against its walls of flesh, the conscious pain and anguish of spirit, that age the body? As truly as I live to-day, the years that had passed over me almost without a trace had turned my blooming young wife into a feeble, faded woman, and her hair was

white as snow. But oh, never so beautiful in her fair maidenhood, never half so dear in her noble womanhood, as now, when I held her in my arms, my heart full of thankfulness for the truth, the love, the faith that had survived the most cruel test to which ever woman was subjected.





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